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Running Head: SURVEY OF TEACHERS WHO IMPLEMENT OUTDOOR INSTRUCTION  
IN THEIR CURRICULUM

Is Outdoor Instruction Used for the Enhancement of Academic Instruction: A Survey of  
Teachers Who Implement Outdoor Instruction in their Curriculum

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EDUC: 322

Dr. Eder

## Introduction

“Outdoor education/instruction can be simply defined as experiential learning in, for, or about the outdoors. The term 'outdoor education', however, is used broadly to refer to a range of organized activities that take place in a variety of ways in predominantly outdoor environments” (htt). Although outdoor instruction has been used to conduct science experiments, or to do physical activity in the past, it can be used for other subjects and other teaching methods. Outdoor education/instruction is nearly taken out completely in today’s modern society.

Outdoor education has become nearly obsolete in the midst of common core and state standards. Outdoor education is misunderstood to be used for physical education or science, when in fact outdoor education can be used for the instruction of all subjects. Studies have shown that it helps with students’ academic development as well as their character development (Wurdinger, 1994).

The purpose of this research study was to see how outdoor education/instruction is being used currently as well as if it is being used at all. “Confining learning exclusively to the four walls of a classroom just doesn’t make sense. Increased academic achievement and heightened enthusiasm for learning, coupled with decreased discipline problems, all have been associated with learning that happens beyond the school walls. The concepts of learning style and multiple intelligences are also very compatible with outdoor learning activities,” (Broda, 2007). Our results from the survey have found that teachers are using outdoor instruction for other subjects. However a common issue with outdoor instruction is that teachers have a hard time finding a way to accommodate it in their lesson plans, especially with the common core and state standards.

This study will take a closer look at the role common core, the benefits of, and what society currently says about outdoor education.

### Literature Review

Outdoor Education has been a system in place since the early 20th century, as a result of the industrial revolution.

“During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the heavy industrialization of the United States precipitated an interest in looking beyond the smokestacks and factories to the natural world. The Nature Study Movement espoused the intriguing idea that children were innately interested in nature and were “born naturalists.” The Nature Study Movement saw nature as a teaching tool. Proponents urged teachers to leave the classroom and take students outside for direct experience,” (Broda, 2007).

Not everyone of course sees the benefit of expanding the classroom learning to the outdoors. In 1997, Cushman wrote an article to express the rise of interest in outdoor education again due to “a generation after the teach-ins of the first Earth-Day.” The article expresses how critics believe outdoor education to be detrimental to the growth of the population and society. A backlash was developing among people whose opinion on the environmental movement was that it was based on flawed information. These people believed it to be detrimental to society to take advantage of the impressionability of children and telling them to reject consumption which hurts the economic growth and capitalism of our society (Cushman, 1997). Another concern for outdoor education is the confidence of the teacher as well as the schools’ standards and requirements.

“It is clear that the provision of outdoor learning in schools and universities is affected by a wide range of barriers and opportunities. Notable barriers include: (i) fear and concern about health and safety; (ii) teachers’ a lack of confidence in teaching outdoors; (iii) school and university curriculum requirements limiting opportunities for outdoor learning; (iv) shortages of time, resources and support; and (v) wider changes within and beyond the education sector,” (Rickinson, 2004).

This study looks closely to see if outdoor instruction is being used in the classroom in today's common core and standards based society. We are also looking at how outdoor instruction is being used with all subjects. The literature review looks closely at the benefits of outdoor instruction as well as the different ways that it can be used in the following subjects; math, science, social studies/history, language arts, and physical education. Outdoor education is be dependent upon the space that is available to the school. For the majority of schools, their space provided is a small space that has carefully arranged natural material selected according to the schools' and the community's needs. Urban schools need to develop compact learning areas on small school sites, given that they are limited to space. Few schools are on larger plots of land and are able to use their environment more frequently allowing them for more outdoor instruction opportunities (Broda, 2011).

The accessibility and the needs of each school are dependent upon its geographical location. Urban schools are often at a huge disadvantage, being that they only have a limited space for the students to play outside. Suburban schools often have better access to an outdoor space, whether it is their own school grounds or the local park. Rural schools have plenty of space; they can be surrounded by forests or fields of land. This research study looked at the location of the schools but also to see what kind of institution it is, such as public, private, or home school.

If it is a public school, they are mandated by the state standards more rigidly and are less likely to have time to accommodate outdoor instruction. Private schools are more flexible in what they teach, since they are independent from the state and have a different curriculum. Home schools are free to go where ever they see fit to teach for their student's needs, if they have the resources to do so, such as a mode of transportation. Of course taking learning outside does not

need to be an intricate show or field trip, it could be something as simple as taking the students around the schools' ground. "School grounds can help students learn about the immediate environment. The area surrounding the school can also provide hands-on learning opportunities and may enrich the curriculum in many subjects," (Knapp, 1996).

Science is not the only subject that can be explored outside of the classroom. Students can expand their learning by going on adventures to a Native American site, or a museum that further expands on their social studies lesson. Students can also practice math problems through team building activities that can take place outside. Teachers can go as far as allowing students to be inspired by their surroundings and write in a writer's notebook; a writer's notebook is a tool that teachers use to prompt their students to write their ideas and put it into stories, they could write poems, or even a personal narrative. "Experiential education is a process of learning which can be used with a variety of subject matters: it is a theory which claims that experience is a vital component to the learning process" (Wurdinger, 1994).

Outdoor education requires teachers to think outside the box. They have to find ways to tie in hands on activities and interaction with the outside world to their lessons. It is a process to learn through experiences. Most teachers need to focus their instruction around activities that help students engage with the environment as well as connect with the lesson being taught. (Wurdinger, 1994). Besides from all of the benefits for creativity and exploration in all subject areas outdoor education has also been shown to affect students' attitudes and confidence.

"There is substantial research evidence to suggest that outdoor adventure programmes can impact positively on young people's; attitudes, beliefs and self-perceptions – examples of outcomes include independence, confidence, self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy, personal effectiveness and coping strategies: interpersonal and social skills – such as social effectiveness, communication skills, group cohesion and teamwork," (Rickinson, 2004).

Now how do all of these things fit into a standards based education society? “There are different types of standards, but the type of standards that most outdoor educators will be dealing with are called ‘content standards’,” (Watters, 2006). The article, *Standards-based Accountability in Academic Outdoor Education Programs*, by Watters, is more specific towards outdoor education programs in universities, but that does not mean that standards are not being used or required for elementary and secondary level outdoor instruction. Teachers have to follow the standards for each subject, seeing that they are teaching them through the medium of any space or location outside of their classroom.

### Methodology

To test the hypothesis a survey was conducted that was solely for current teachers. A link was shared of the survey with teachers of different backgrounds, such as home school, public, and private (religious, charter, etc.). From there teachers were to answer a series of questions in regards to their methods of outdoor instruction, what subjects they use, as well as how much time they make or are given for outdoor instruction. Survey participants were also asked what setting their school was in, such as rural, urban, or suburban. They were to describe what they would like to change in their curriculum in order to implement outdoor instruction and if they see it as beneficial. The participants were also given the opportunity to share how they use their available space for their instruction outdoors.

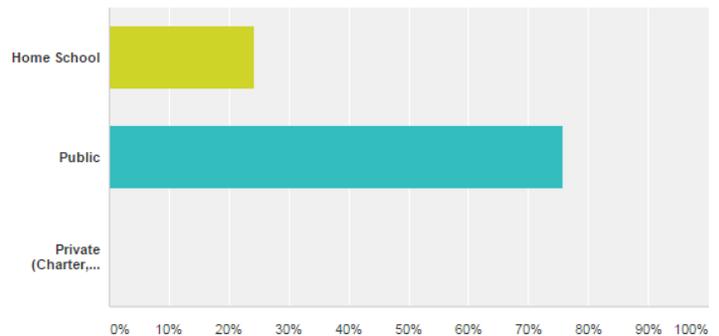
The survey had questions where participants had options, but were only allowed to choose one, or more. For instance, a question about where they taught, if in a public, private, or home school, they were only allowed to choose one option. In another instance the participants were asked which subjects they taught with outdoor instruction they were given the following

options; science, social studies/history, math, language arts, and physical Education. From those options they were able to choose more than one, whichever applied to what they actually teach. The majority of the questions were response. It was important to see how current teachers were implementing outdoor instruction and their opinion on its usefulness.

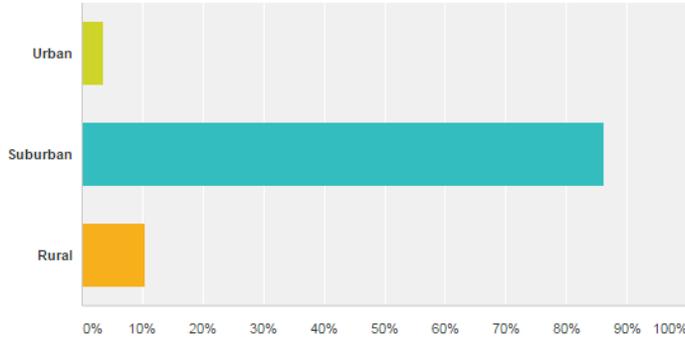
### Results

Below we have the percentages of the teachers from each school, such as public, private or home school, as well as their responses and their availabilities. This survey was taken by a total of 36 participants, with 7 of them skipping through the entire survey. The survey was created so that all questions required an answer, but not all participants went through with answering questions after signing the consent. All participants agreed to take the survey therefore giving consent to participate in the study. The intention for this study was to reach current teachers, since the hypothesis is trying to identify how outdoor instruction is being used currently if at all.

Of the 29 participants that responded to this question, what type of school do you teach at, 24% are home school teachers and 76% are public school teachers. The majority of teachers who took the survey were public school teachers, Unfortunately the perspective from a private school teacher was not given.



The participants were to identify what setting their school was in, urban, suburban, or rural. The school’s location affects greatly their opportunity to implement outdoor instruction. Of



the 29 who responded 3% are in an urban setting, 86% suburban, and 10% are in a rural are. It is assumed that the participants in a rural setting are home school teachers, however it is not certain

if other schools were in a rural setting. This is a limitation, not being able to ask specifically which school was located in which setting.

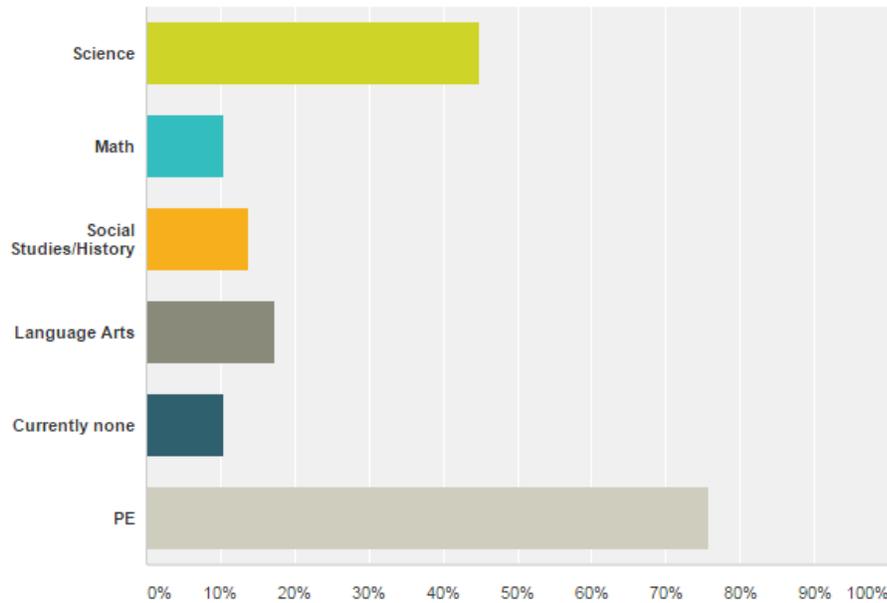
Answer Choices	Responses
General Education Classroom	92.59% 25
Special Education Classroom	7.41% 2
Total	27

The study proceeded to ask the participants if they teach general education or special education. It is interesting to see if students with different learning abilities were being exposed to outdoor instruction as well. Only 27 participants answered this question. Of the 27, 93% are general education teachers, and 7% are special education. Again the limitation here is not being able to see who is teaching what, if the public school teacher is the only special education teacher, or if there is a home school teacher that has a special education classroom.

Approximately 59% of the 29 participants have about an hour or more of outdoor instruction a week. 7% do not have time for outdoor instruction. 34% have about 30 minutes or so for outdoor instruction a week.

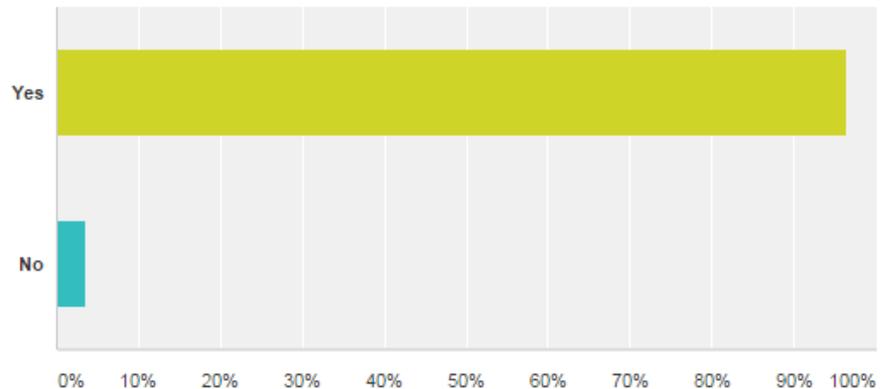
Participants were then to describe tell which subjects they use for outdoor instruction, this was a multiple answer question. 45% of the participants teach science with outdoor instruction.

10% teach math, 14% teach social studies/history, 17% teach language arts, 10% teach no subjects with outdoor instruction, and as expected physical education is the subject most used for outdoor instruction with 76% of the participants teaching.



Participants were then asked if they assigned students homework that requires them to go outside and explore. Of the 29 17% responded yes. 66% responded no, with one participant explaining that the majority of their students live in areas that are unsafe and their parents do not arrive home until very late. 17% of the participants responded that it depends on the curriculum and what is being taught in the classroom such as a unit on astronomy.

One of the questions asked if the teachers had access to an outdoor environment, such as a playground, park, etc. (Outdoor meaning any place outside of the



classroom and the school building.) Only 28 responded. 96% responded that they do indeed have access to an outdoor space, and 4% responded no they do not.

One of the questions asked was if there is anything teachers wish they could substitute for outdoor instruction, or what they could change in order to make more time for it. 7% responded that they wish they had the accessibility. 10% simply responded yes. 34% want more time in their day. 28% responded no. 14% responded that they need smaller classes and better classroom management.

The final question of the survey was asking the participants if they saw a benefit in using outdoor instruction. 100% responded yes, with 93% of them responding yes, and 7% responded yes with a spiritual emphasis/connection.

### Conclusion

This study has shown that there are some teachers making time for outdoor instruction in their curriculum. Though they find it very difficult due to the lack of time, and the restraints they feel from common core standards. Different subjects were also shown to be used with outdoor instruction, whether it was through actual interaction with the outdoor environment or simply taking their classwork outside and working in the fresh air and open space.

There were various limitations of course. The largest limitations was that it was difficult to find out which type of school, whether public, private, or home school, was in which setting. Having this detail would have helped to see who are the ones that are limited according to their setting, or how they are creative to still take advantage of their setting and incorporate outdoor instruction in their curriculum. Another limitation is that there was no one from the private

school perspective. Another limitation is that it was not asked how many years the teacher has been teaching. This fact would have helped to see who has been implementing outdoor instruction longer or who is more likely to implement it in their curriculum, the experienced teacher or the teacher post common core?

The results however showed some interesting results. It was surprising to see that teachers are making about an hour of time each week for outdoor instruction. It is also very surprising to see that they are implementing different subjects; social studies/history, math, science, language arts. When a person thinks of outdoor instruction they mainly think about physical education or some science experiment or excursion, not necessarily how the outdoors could apply to a lesson on Shakespeare or the crusades, let alone fractions. A problem with this question is that it was eliminated the possibility to see how the teachers used each subject with outdoor instruction. The survey was done through surveymonkey.com and it was limited to the survey to a number of questions, with only a total of 10 questions for the survey.

It was very refreshing to learn that all of the teachers were enthusiastic about making time for outdoor instruction in their curriculum. They also noted the benefits of allowing the kids to interact with the outside world and learning through a different medium rather than being secluded to the classroom. Teachers also see it very beneficial for the spiritual connection as well. It is to be assumed that those opinions came from home school teachers since in public schools they are not allowed to make religious references besides from an educational view point.

The literature used for this study proved to be very helpful and provided the opportunity to go further in the study and really learn about the benefits of outdoor instruction and where it all began. It was interesting to know that outdoor instruction has many names, but the same

concept over time. The progression and development of the importance of outdoor instruction also changes over the years. Over all, the hypothesis was not proven true. Outdoor instruction has nearly been completely taken out of curriculum in today's society, but teachers are still able to make some time for it weekly, or implement it with their in class instruction. It would be very interesting to continue this study further to see the digression, or progression, of outdoor instruction in a society that is so heavily focused on technology and standards that take up time in the classroom.

### Appendix

Survey Disclaimer: The purpose of this survey is to determine if outdoor instruction is regularly used in an educational environment for the academic enhancement of students. This survey has multiple choice, short answer, and opinion based, questions. Your participation and honesty in this survey is greatly appreciated. Help us determine if outdoor instruction has become obsolete or is still being used in today's academic society. Please click on agree to continue if you wish to participate in this survey.

\_ Agree

1. What type of school do you teach at? (Choose one)
  - a. Public
  - b. Private
  - c. Home School
2. What is your school's setting? (Choose one)
  - a. Urban
  - b. Suburban
  - c. Rural
  - d. Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_
3. Which classroom do you teach? (Choose one)
  - a. General Education
  - b. Special Education
4. How much time is spent for outdoor instruction a week? (Short answer)
5. Which subjects are taught with outdoor instruction? (Check those that apply)
  - a. Science
  - b. Math

- c. Social Studies/History
  - d. Language Arts
  - e. PE
  - f. None
6. Do you assign homework that requires students to go outdoors and explore? (Short answer)
7. Do you have access to an outdoor environment, such as a playground, park, etc. (Outdoor meaning any place outside of the classroom and the school building). (Choose one)
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. If no, why? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Is there anything you wish you could substitute for outdoor instruction? Is there something you wish you could change about your curriculum which would allow for more outdoor instruction? (Short answer)
9. Do you think outdoor instruction is beneficial to the learning process and academic growth of your students? (Short answer)

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